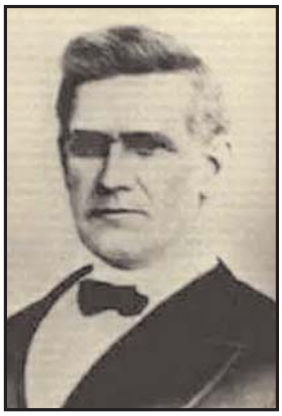
The Trail of Tears in Marion County: An Eyewitness Account

The following is an excerpt from "Marion County as She Was Settled," serialized in the Mountain Echo newspaper in Yellville in 1899. The author, William Baugh Flippin, had come as a teenager with a number of relatives from western Tennessee and southern Indiana in 1836. Although the writer could not remember the year at the time he wrote this account, we now know it was around Christmas time in 1838, when Mr. Flippin was 18. When he wrote this account, he was 79. He came to be an eyewitness because his uncle, Jesse Goodman, owned the ferry where the Cherokees and Creeks crossed the White on their forced removal to Oklahoma Territory. It was then known as Talburt's Ferry, very near the site of the crossing later known as Denton Ferry, just a few miles above the present-day city of Cotter.



W.B. Flippin

June 30, 1899

About the year of 1839 or 1840, a large detachment of Indians came through this county, said to be about 3,000 men, women and children, moving west. They were Cherokees and Creeks.

I am not certain as to the time, as there have been at least two moves, for some refused to go with the first immigration.

Many of the Cherokees were well-dressed and riding good horses; fine-looking men. From their appearance I judged them to be half-breeds, while the majority—many of them—were poorly clad.

Some of the women only having blankets wrapped around them, several carrying papooses wrapped in a blanket or some kind of cloth and fastened to the back of their mothers. Seeing so many, I wondered that I did not hear a scream from a single papoose.

I do not think that the women (I mean our wives), if the men would tie their papooses on their backs and start them on foot a hundred or perhaps two hundred miles, but what they would have music continually that would not be very melodious or charming to listen to.

It was winter when they came to White River. Ice was frozen over along the banks of the river.

I was to assist the ferryman in setting the host across the river, in a very ordinary ferry boat with two oars to row with. Instead of their stopping to make terms to cross the river in the ferry boat, they never pretended to wait, but waded across the river, women and men, all except the few who had horses or carriages. They did not pretend to let the women who had papooses ride.

It reminded me of a drove of cattle crossing a stream. The river was unusually low at the time, but it was over 200 yards wide. I stepped it once on the ice, when it was frozen over. They camped shortly after crossing the river, and built up fires and remained all

night. The agent, whose name I have forgotten, had come on before them, and brought provisions for man and beast, at least to supply what was lacking.

There came that evening to the camp a large, fine-looking man, whom I had seen a few times before, who had but recently come to the county. He had a brother that had preceded him several years. They were both from Kentucky. The eldest one was named Erving Hogan, the other Micajah Hogan. He was a gambler, and had come for the purpose of gambling with the Indians, which he did that night, and won a considerable amount of money.

Next day early the host moved on, but two Indians crossed back over the river. Hogan had returned and put up at the house of the ferryman. I learned that the name of one of the Indians was Benge, a subchief, the other a tall, active-looking Indian, whose name was Young. He immediately told Hogan his business was to play a game of cards with him. Hogan readily consented. They sat down on a large log and commenced playing what is called ‘‘seven up.’’ Hogan kept talking.

Presently a crowd had gathered to see the game. Young hardly ever spoke, but seemed to watch the game closely. I noticed that Hogan was losing almost every game. They were betting freely, playing out a hand. Hogan came in one of being out, as they called the end of the game; Hogan threw down his cards and cried out, in a loud tone of voice, ‘‘out!’’

‘‘Yes,’’ said the Indian, ‘‘out of Hell, and a pity for that!’’

Young got up pretty soon after and said, ‘‘I am satisfied I have won back all the money you won from you last night. Benge, during the game, kept speaking in Indian to Young. Hogan asked him to speak in English, and Benge, whose eyes fairly spewed fire, returning the compliment and drew out a fine silver-handled pistol.

July 7, 1899

Hogan told him that he had no arms. Benge said, you shall not have that for an excuse, and pulled out a mate to the pistol he had and offered it to Hogan, but he refused to take it.

I expected to see Benge shoot him, but he let fly a volley of oaths, cursing Hogan and the whites, saying they had taken their homes from them and compelled them to go from the homes of their fathers to a land they knew nothing of in the far west.

Hogan told him he had nothing to do with it.

Benge replied, but your people did, and I hate them all alike. Benge was a large, square-built man and appeared as vicious as an enraged lion.

Benge and Young mounted their horses and rode off. I don’t mean to say that Hogan was not a brave man. I have seen him in several fierce contests, and he never seemed to fear the face of any man, but the Indian seemed to get the drop on him.